

STRIKE!

A Simulation of Labor-employee Relations

Characters: The Berwind-White Coal Company Board of Directors,
The United Mine Workers Union Bosses

Object: To make the most money and set up the best conditions for your side.

How it works: The class will be divided up into teams, which will compete with each other for power, influence, and money. There are no benefits whatsoever for the workers at the beginning, so everything must be bargained for in whatever way works best for you. The Company on the other hand has no requirements on what they must pay the workers or how they must treat them. Their only requirement is to make as much money as possible while maintaining sensible business practices to avoid going out of business. Both sides will learn the art of compromise or find out that the consequences of conflict may be more than you bargained for.

Each side has basic financial needs they must meet and anything beyond that is up to them to gain any way they can. The winner is the team or teams that do the best job of managing their side successfully. The losers are those who don't get what they want or lose their jobs as leaders of their group. Smaller groups will represent other elements of society such as non-mining company employees, strikebreakers, and elements on either side of the law.

Where and when: This is a simulation of labor conditions in western Pennsylvanian coal mining towns of about 1921. All facts and figures provided are based on those taken from Senate Document #633 1909- 1910, The Immigrant Commission: "The Immigrant in Industry", Beik, Mildred A., *The Miners of Windber: Class, Ethnicity, and the Labor Movement in a Pennsylvania Coal Town, 1890's-1930's*, and from local oral histories.

Employer's Needs

1. In order to produce 50,000 tons of coal it will take 3,000 miners 5 days of work at 8-hour days.
2. Workers must receive a minimum of \$3.00 a day to meet their living expenses. If they are paid less than that they will leave town and find work elsewhere.
3. Workers are paid by the ton of coal produced not by the hour or day worked. The going rate is \$1.28 a ton for coal. The company does not pay for so-called "dead work" which involves cutting away and hauling the rock to get at the coal or loading the coal and bringing it to the surface. Different miners work at different speeds and some days would get them no pay at all. All the company is interested in is in the coal, if it takes more than 8 hours a day to dig the average of 3.33 tons produced daily, then the miners must make up the hours on their own without additional pay.
4. At the start of the simulation the Company has a 50,000-ton surplus of coal in storage.
5. The Company must pay a basic operating cost of \$10,000 a week to operate and maintain its machinery and to pay for shipping costs for the coal.
6. Any miners employed at the start of the simulation will already have paid for their own equipment. New miners hired will have to pay one dollar for new equipment and will work at only 50% of the productivity of regular workers for the first week of employment while they are in training.
7. Accidents do occur. On the average there is a 5% chance of an accident in the mines each week. If scab or replacement workers are being used in the mines the accident rate is doubled for one month. With each accident between 1-20 workers will be killed or injured from cave-ins, explosions, gas poisonings, or dangerous equipment. The occurrence of accidents can be determined by the roll of a percentile die. These workers must be replaced by the Company which means that they will need training etc. At the start of the simulation there is no compensation in pay for injured or dead workers as a result of accidents on the job.

You must decide:

1. what kind of wages and benefits you will give the workers
2. the length of the workday
3. the number of workdays in a week
4. how you will handle worker demands and how you will respond to possible strikes, violence etc.

It is necessary that you keep records of your team's weekly financial standing in order to see if you are making a profit or not. It is suggested that you use something like the following example:

Price of coal \$10.41 a ton x 10,000 tons = \$104,100

Price paid to miners \$ 1.28 a ton x 10,000 tons = \$12,800 daily wages

Weekly expenses \$10,000 ÷ 5 days = \$2,000 daily expenses

\$104,000 income

-\$12,800 wages

-\$2,000 expenses

\$89,000 daily profit

Make adjustments as necessary when the price of coal or workers' demands change your costs. Then give weekly totals to compare how you are doing over the course of time. This will help you determine how much of pay raises you can give the workers and what price you can charge for the coal.



Workers' Needs

1. You must make \$3.00 a day to cover your basic living expenses and support your families this includes:

a. rent and furnishings (.50 ¢)

(The company owns the homes and pays the utilities)

b. food (\$2.00)

c. mining equipment and clothing (.50 ¢)

Any additional miscellaneous personal expenses and special purchases must be bought on credit from the company store.

2. Workers are paid by the ton of coal produced not by the hour or day worked. The going rate is \$1.28 a ton for coal. The company does not pay for so-called "dead work" which involves cutting away and hauling the rock to get at the coal or loading the coal and bringing it to the surface. Different miners work at different speeds and some days would get them no pay at all. All the company is interested in is in the coal, if it takes more than 8 hours a day to dig the average of 3.33 tons produced daily, then the miners must make up the hours on their own without additional pay.

3. Be careful how long you go on strike:

a. You can go 1 week without pay, but this will use up all of your personal savings.

b. If a strike extends into a second week the workers start to go into debt to the Company Store because it's the only place where you can shop in town. At the beginning of the third week the Company will begin to deduct your charges from your future pay once you do go back to work.

4. If you can't pay your debts after one month, you will have your line of credit cut and be forced to work for the company until your debts are paid off. In other words, you are stuck in this town until you pay up. If you don't pay your debts you can go to jail or skip town and become a fugitive from the law.

5. At the start of the simulation you have:

a. no benefits

b. no job security

c. no contract

In other words, everything must be negotiated. If you don't ask, they are not going to give it to you!

6. Accidents do occur. On the average there is a 5% chance of an accident in the mines each week. If scab or replacement workers are being used in the mines the accident rate is doubled. With each accident between 1-20 workers will be killed or injured from cave-ins, explosions, gas poisonings, or dangerous equipment. The occurrence of accidents can be determined by the roll of a percentile die. These dice are available at most hobby or game stores. These workers must be replaced by the Company which means that they will need training etc. At the start of the simulation there is no compensation in pay for injured or dead workers as a result of accidents on the job.

It is necessary that you keep records of your team's weekly financial standing in order to see if you are making a profit or not. It is suggested that you use something like the following example:

Price of coal paid to miners \$ 1.28 a ton x 10,000 tons = \$12,800
daily wages

\$12,800 daily wages x 5 days = \$64,000 weekly wages

\$3.00 a day living expenses x 3,000 miners x 7 days = \$63,000 weekly expenses

\$64,000 wages

-\$63,000 expenses

\$1,000 weekly profit ÷ 3,000 miners = .33¢ a week profit per miner
Make adjustments as necessary when negotiations change your wages.
Then give weekly totals to compare how you are doing over the course of time. This will help you determine how much of pay raises you can ask for and how much money workers can afford to pay towards benefits or a strike fund.



Special Characters:

Day workers: Commonly known as Company men. Unlike the regular miners, you are native-born Americans and not immigrants. Your jobs have higher prestige and pay. You do skilled jobs such as accounting, carpentry, blacksmithing, machining and counting and loading coal. You earn about \$7.50 a day instead of being paid by the ton. Your work is far less dangerous than the miners' and the company treats you better because you are harder to replace. You represent 630 of the 3000 miners in Windber.

The Strikebreakers: You are the most recent set of immigrants. You will take any job at any pay whether there is a strike going on or not. You don't trust unions and cannot afford to pay union dues. You number 5,000 strong and the company would love to put you in the miners' place if they get too troublesome. Their only worry is how to get you trained fast enough. Try to deal with them to see if they will hire you to replace the miners.

Coal and Iron Police: Private rail police experienced at busting heads and breaking up strikes. They are a legally-armed force, which is given a lot of leeway to keep the peace, as long as they obey the law. They are very expensive, but very effective. They can guard, protect, enforce lockouts, and disperse mobs.

The Hoodlums: These unemployed desperadoes can be hired to do just about any crime you can think of. They may be of use to the miners or the company depending on who pays them better. They will naturally be concerned as to who takes the rap if they get caught.

The Interborough Rapid Transit Company of New York: You are mostly interested in keeping the subways running on time. If anything disrupts that you are concerned. The going rate for coal is \$10 a ton, but you will gladly buy more if the price goes down. You cannot afford to pay more than \$20 a ton for coal to break even with your operating costs. You need about 100,000 tons a week, but have other suppliers if Berwind-White's prices get too high.

The Government: All judges, police, city, county, state, or federal officials are played by the teacher.

Debriefing:

1. What were the tactics used by each side in the simulation? How are these similar to those described in your textbook or those that the teacher has told you about?
2. How successful was your group? What worked well? What might you have done differently? What benefits were earned for the workers? Are there any that you could have asked for given more time? (Health care, hourly pay, minimum wage, holidays, weekends, paid vacations, childcare, profit sharing, accident insurance, better working conditions, competition for the company store etc.)
3. How good was your leadership? What could they have done better? Could you do better?
4. How did this strike compare to the real strike in 1921? (See the book by Mildred Beik listed below. The only thing agreed to after over a year on strike was the right to unionize).
5. How did this simulation compare to other labor disputes in your own area or time?
6. How do you think that you might react if you were caught in the middle of a labor dispute in the future?